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ABSTRACT

A technique to help English as a second language students master the basic elements of expository prose is considered in terms of course objectives and the types of assignments used to accomplish them. A characteristic of many highly verbal students entering a college program is their propensity to "talk on paper" in an informal, ungrammatical, disorganized fashion. To prevent the students from reinforcing their own patterns of errors, a tightly structured approach using model essays incorporating definite grammatical constructions is used. The technique focuses on a limited but correct set of sentence structures, accurate punctuation, use of transition words, and the ability to use organizational patterns. Examples are presented of combining simple sentences into complex ones and of how time clauses beginning with such subordinates as "when", and "before", can begin or end a sentence. The assignments concentrate on using a particular sentence structure in essays with student-chosen topics. As students write essays following models, the mistakes that they make in other constructions appear and become a second component of instruction. In addition, the choice of topics not only forces the fluent use of many complex structures but also incorporates repeated experience in using the basic rhetorical patterns and their related structural vocabularies which are necessary for competent college-level writing. By the end of the course, five ways of organizing a paragraph have been practiced, and the art of developing supporting ideas has been taught.
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TALKING ON PAPER? AN ANTIDOTE

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A characteristic of many highly verbal students entering a college program is their propensity to "talk on paper" in informal, ungrammatical, disorganized fashion. This article, which includes examples of assignments and student work, presents a successful technique developed to help such students master the basic elements of expository prose.

To prevent the students from reinforcing their own patterns of errors, a tightly structured approach using model essays incorporating definite grammatical constructions, e.g., relative clauses, time elements, participial phrases, is used. As students write original essays following these models, the mistakes that they make in other constructions show up and become a second component of instructions. Finally, the choice of topics not only forces the fluent use of many complex structures but also incorporates repeated experience in using the basic rhetorical patterns and their related structural vocabularies which are necessary for competent college-level writing.

This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 1981 CATESOL Conference in Monterey.

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A characteristic of many highly verbal students entering a college program is their propensity to talk on paper in an informal, ungrammatical and disorganized fashion, a fact that I discovered when I first started to teach a pre-rhetoric course. Over the semesters, I have evolved a practical, simple, organized method to help them cope with this problem. This paper will describe both the scope of the course objectives and the types of assignments used to accomplish them.

First of all -- or festival, as an Arab student once gaily began a composition, and I thought it hilarious until another student surpassed it by producing secondable -- what precisely is meant by talking on paper? Either the student goes on and on and on with strings of simple sentences connected with and, but, or so or s/he uses certain complex structures incorrectly, the result being many sentence fragments. If one reads such writing aloud at a conversational pace, it sounds reasonably correct and certainly fluent, but from every criterion for writing expository prose, it is atrocious. Consider the following example:

> Education has changed from a few years ago. In many years ago, nobody care about education and they did not have any school, college and university but they have a few school and belongs to the rich family and other people couldn't get there but the rich people wouldn't use their education to get job.

Clearly, this type of writing calls for some urgent measures of control.

Second, a brief description of the class and its position within the structure of the total ESL program may be helpful. At the ESL Language Center, ESL 5/6, is a required course for entering students who test as not ready for rhetoric and, therefore, the ESL equivalent of English A or bonehead English. ESL 5/6, Writing Workshop for International Students, carries six units of credit, meets three times a week for two hours, and consists of one hour of grammar review and one of composition. The students, who come from a variety of international backgrounds and an even greater variety of ESL programs, often admit that their difficulties do not necessarily stem from poor ESL teaching but that they simply do not like to write and are poor writers in their own language. Rather interestingly, some of the more proficient writers, who have succeeded in gaining admission to the higher level course, elect to wait a semester, preferring to acquire, through a semester of intensive and extensive written work, the in-depth experience in writing English which they realize that they lack.

Keeping in mind the combination of limited experience, limited talent, and limited ability to write correct English

sentences which characterizes my students, I plan the semester's work around four components. In the first place, I must limit the writing; I must stop the flow -- or the stilted non-flow of fragments. I must limit the students' production because, although I believe that writing can only be learned by writing, producing errors endlessly does not qualify as learning. The writing must be limited to a reasonable number of structures which the students must utilize until they can control them adequately so as to be able to express the kinds of ideas needed to do college-level writing, which, in the case of our international students of whatever major, is expository prose, not creative writing. Combining this limited number of structures leads eventually to some quite sophisticated sentences.

Secondly, I must force the students to punctuate correctly -- commas, semi-colons, etc. In addition, the class must be led away from the and, but, and so syndrome to the use of subordinators, of the more complex sentence connectors such as moreover, consequently, and however, and of the accurate structure vocabulary which will help them state their ideas more exactly.

Third, I must teach them something about the Western modes of organization, though they will go more deeply into these in their next semester's work. Again, I limit them -- and myself -- for purposes of maximum correctness, aiming at only five main modes of organization: chronological order, both process and narrative; comparison and contrast; generalization and specification; classification; and cause and effect. Simultaneously, emphasis on this type of organization gradually weans the class away from the personal essay to the more objective writing which will gain them success in their college courses.

Taking the first three elements into account -- a limited but correct set of sentence structures, accurate punctuation and use of transition words, and ability to use organization patterns -- for this method to work there is one cardinal rule, which, perhaps, is the method in synthesis: never elicit language which one has not previously and personally provided. In contemporary terminology, one must program the computer if it is to be asked to function.

Now that the steps have been introduced, the question naturally arises, "How does this work in the classroom?" As a basis for this course, for several years I have been using a British publication, Guided Course in English Composition[1], which consists of a set of model compositions, each of which practices one type of sentence structure. Practices, not teaches, is an

[1]John Milne and T. C. Jupp, GUIDED COURSE IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION, London: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1971.

accurate description because, while the authors are very casual about the actual presentation of the syntactic structures, they are extremely helpful in the way that they build up their overall complexity, adding one structure per composition and using each one learned in every successive unit. To this Purple Bible, as one clever student dubbed it, other materials are added according to the needs of an individual class; that is, it is the method, not any particular text per se, which is the important point.

The actual teaching of the structure is never casual; on the contrary, using a non-technical but transformationally inspired approach, I teach one model for each structure to be learned. The students write this down for future reference and are expected to refer to it when they need it. For example, when dealing with relative clauses, I explain why the simple sentences

A. The bride wore a dress.

B. The dress was made of silk.

can produce the complex sentences

C. The bride wore a dress which was made of silk.

D. The dress (which) the bride wore was made of silk.

The students need to know why sentence C needs which, while sentence D may or may not use it, as well as why no commas are needed in either. On the other hand, in

E. A certificate is signed by the minister.

F. The certificate is proof of legality.

which produce the complex sentences

G. The certificate, which is proof of legality, is signed by the minister.

H. The minister signed the certificate, which is proof of legality.

Each retains the which and both must also have commas. No particular emphasis is placed on terminology or grammatical rules as such; only enough is used to explain how the structure works, how the students can make it come out correctly, and how they can go back to the original simple sentences to see why any mistake made came out incorrectly.

The first chapter of the text provides effective examples of how time clauses beginning with such subordinates as when,

before, after, as soon as, etc., can begin a sentence, followed by a comma, or end a sentence, in which case no comma is needed. In addition, the students need to know the rather odd fact that, while there is agreement between time clauses and the main clause in the past and present, as in

I. As soon as oil was found, people began to change their ways.

J. Now that Kuwait is wealthy, people have everything they need.

the same is not true of the future. It is incorrect to write

*K. The economy will need other supports when the oil will be gone.

while it is correct to write

L. The economy will need other supports when the oil is gone.

This is an example of programming before eliciting. They must also be taught to cluster time elements, as in

M. The next day at dawn, as soon as the first bomb dropped, the people realized with horror that the war was starting again.

versus

*N. As soon as the first bomb dropped, the people realized with horror at dawn that the war was starting again the next day.

Having presented this much, I then control the assignment, so that the students will practice time expressions, many of them. Both they and I fully realize that a three-paragraph composition using only sentences with time expressions or an inordinate number of relative clauses is stylistically atrocious, but I dissuade them from attempting others by explaining the goals and methods of the course and assuring them of success in achieving them.

In the early weeks of the semester, for example, having already worked on time (a), because (b), and relative clauses (c), the class writes a composition whose beginning paragraph is modeled on the following excerpt:

Before I came to the U.S., I used to go to sleep early, but now I am getting used to going to sleep late. I used to have dinner after 9:00 when I was at home; however, I am used to having it at 6:00 now. I have had to get used to different sports, too, because at home I used to play football and I never used to play basketball. In Jordan, I used to listen to Arabic songs, but now I am getting used to hearing American music. The only thing I am not getting used to is the food. I don't think that I will ever get used to it.

Writing from a model composition and writing from the basis of student needs are two useful methods of providing the class with opportunities for structured writing, but they are not enough. A third way is what my students refer to as parallel paragraphing. If something is very difficult -- as the use of participles, for example, invariably is -- before the students are expected to do more original work, albeit based on a model, they are asked to do a parallel paragraph. For example, the passage below is the first section of a three paragraph description which includes the passive voice, past participles, and the multiple uses of the -ing form.

Taking a course in elementary science in a large university can be a very trying experience. Such courses are usually taught by groups of staff members instead of by individual professors. The lectures are usually given in huge auditoriums and may be attended by as many as 500 students. Just finding a seat can be a problem. Interrupting a lecture to request an explanation is out of the question.[3]

My model sentence for the class to remember goes something like this: "Trying to teach these confusing participles is a very tiring job. After being taught them, the confused students are exhausted..." The class traces each -ing form and past participles to its original clause and then each student writes a set of parallel paragraphs about an appropriate topic of personal choice, such as the following:

Making a trip to Great America on a sunny day can be a very exciting experience. Such a trip is usually planned by an individual friend but may be planned by a group or a club. Great America is located in San Jose and may be attended by as many as 10,000 people. Just buying a ticket can be a problem on a weekend. Finding a seat to take a rest is out of the question. ...

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[3] Jean Praninskas, RAPID REVIEW OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, revised edition, 1975, p. 292.

My sister, who is 23 years old, got married this summer. She was married at our home, which is in the south-west of England. Her husband's family came to stay with us because they live in another part of England. My sister met her husband while she was studying at the university. When she was at the university, her husband was a research student. They waited until he finished his studies before they got married.[2]

Typical student essays are the following:

My friend, who is at Holy Names College (c), got married this spring. She was married out of our country, which is Iran (c). My friend met her husband while she was at the ESL Language Center (a). When she was studying at that school (a), her husband was a teacher there. Her husband's family lives in the United States because they are American (b), but my friend's family lives in Iran. They waited until Fatema's family came to California (a). Then they were able to get married because they were all together. ...

In my country, which is the United Arab Emirates, because men and women are not allowed to meet alone (b), there is a special way that a man chooses his future wife (c). The man who wants to get married (c) has to have someone look for his future wife. The person who is usually hired for this (c) is an experienced woman who visits a lot of families (c) until she finds a good bride (a).

Inevitably, however, the students do include other constructions and inevitably they do make mistakes. From this situation arises segment four of the classroom technique, for while teaching a pre-determined number of structures may make a teacher feel very organized, it is also clearly necessary to be flexible enough to teach from the basis of demonstrated need. Eradicating fossilized errors, then, is what the class thrives on. For example, in the first composition, My Education Up to Now, some students usually make mistakes with used to, be used to, or get used to, while others confuse the perfect with the simple past verb forms. These problems form the basis of another lesson with follow-up writing assignments. American Food is an excellent suggestion to give for the used to tangle, for instance, although the student who produced the following comments chose to handle the exercise with a distinctive twist.

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[2] Jupp and Milne, op. cit., p. 12.

After doing this assignment, they find it a challenge to include these usages in subsequent assignments and even in everyday speech, as I discovered when one of my students exclaimed, inpressed by the procedures involved in the consequences of ignoring innumerable parking citations, "Oh, teacher! Going to court, hearing the evidence, and being tried by a judge is a frightening experience!"

A fourth type of practice is now familiar to almost everyone -- sentence combining. Rather than purchasing one of the texts available, I prefer to use my own students' compositions, which mean more to them and whose immediate application they can instantly see. The following, for example, was written by a Chinese student under pressure of an in-class writing assignment:

> Nancy comes to my house today. She is in a low mood. She looks upset. She has some trouble with her family. She asks me to help her. She was graduated from high school last summer last summer. Now her mother always argues with her about college. ...

Here are excerpts from two of the combined versions:

> When Nancy came to my house today, she looked upset because she was in a low mood. She told me that she had had some troubles with her family; therefore, she asked me to help her. Her mother, who always argues with her about college, made her feel unhappy. ...

> Nancy, who came to my house today, looked upset because of a low mood. After she told me that she had some trouble with her family, especially with her mother, who always argues with her about college, she asked me to help her. ...

It can be seen from the combined forms that the classwork had already included time, relative, and <u>because</u> clauses, as well as the use of sentence connectors such as <u>therefore</u>.

By the end of the semester, a sizeable number of syntactic structures has been diligently practiced, among the most important being <u>where</u> in adjective clauses, purpose clauses with <u>so that</u>, various types of noun clauses, with stress on those with similarity in structure to reported speech and those with anticipatory <u>it</u>, <u>if</u> clauses, the uses of infinitives, passive constructions, embedded questions, and both types of participial phrases. At this point in the course, when we are beginning to review, I also require the students to monitor their own use of previously learned constructions by numbering them as in the

following example, where the numbers refer to the chapters in which the items identified were first introduced.

> I was looking for a job all during the summer after I finished my language school (1) so that I could earn my tuition (7); however (13), I could not find any. After I came to Holy Names College (1), where I am studying now (5), I started to look for one again. I had heard that the food service (8) which runs the cafeteria (4) needed some employees, so I went there to ask for a job (3). They did have a job; however (13), being Iranian (14) and not being allowed a Social Security number (17), I couldn't be employed there (17). I felt very upset and asked myself (9) where I could turn for help.

Throughout the semester, of course, the class has concurrently been working on mastery of appropriate vocabulary relating to the methods of organization, for example, the large number of ways of expressing cause/effect relationships. Following my cardinal rule of not eliciting from a possible vacuum, not only do we work out several paragraphs of each kind cooperatively, but I also give the students a handout with as many structural expressions as are available for use in such writing, each set classified according to its syntactic function in English sentences. As the students work on each type of paragraph, I require them to use a certain number of these vocabulary items, as can be seen by the underlined forms in the final example. If they fail to do so, I star the place where something is missing and write large circled R on top of the paper. The R stands for <u>rewrite</u>.

Rewriting, another <u>must</u> for this class, could probably be considered another teaching technique in it. I correct everything, using no symbols, but actually correcting the spelling, re-ordering incorrect syntax, and so on. However, any assignment with more than five or six errors must be rewritten -- and sometimes rewritten again. While rewriting, the student is practicing correct usage, rather than attempting to rectify the errors which could not be identified in the first place.

During the last three weeks of the semester, most writing is done in class. The structures should be mastered by now; the structure vocabulary is at the student's fingertips; five ways of organizing a paragraph have been practiced; moreover, the art of developing supporting ideas has been taught via cooperative class outlines which are then written into individual compositions. The final compositions may not contain the word "I" and must follow the title and methods of development as indicated in the last example.

A Rapidly Developing and Changing Nation

Chronological

The United Arab Emirates make one of the most quickly developing countries in our century.

Before 1920, the land was nearly all desert. The people who lived in it were a community of Arabs under tribal law. Prior to this time, there was no united government. Oil was discovered in 1924 and the country was united almost simultaneously. Since that time, the U.A.E. has developed very rapidly; therefore, at this moment it is a very modern country.

Comparison/ Contrast

In the old days, the tribes traveled from one place to another, searching for good earth for themselves and their animals. Their lives depended mostly on finding suitable land and water in the desert; however, near the sea, the people worked in fishing and other skills which the sea people do. They built ships, dived for pearls, traveled from place to place, and bought everything their region needed.

In contrast, nowadays, life there is absolutely different; everything has changed. In the cities, instead of the camels and sheep of a few years ago, there is a lot of developing transportation, from cars to ships and airplanes. The wood houses which the people used to live in are now palaces and skyscrapers. Formerly there was no good education; presently, modern education is everywhere. Similarly, the people who were just tribes fighting each other for their lives are now one United Emirates.

Cause/ Effect

This great change began when oil was discovered in 1934. Since then, everything has gradually changed; in consequence, there are some bad changes which not everyone likes. For this reason, there is conflict between young and old people. Nobody wants to work any more; as a result, the country is full of foreign people who do the hard work while the Arabs do business. Everything new has its bad and good consequences. No country can develop quickly without them.

Considering that students who can produce such an essay spontaneously have fulfilled the objectives of the class and are ready to move on to more advanced work in English composition, I give them a grade, my blessing, and a pass to the rhetoric course.